

THE LATTER DAYS BETTER THAN THE FORMER.

NOV 7
THEOLOGICAL

A DISCOURSE

ON OCCASION OF

THE PUBLIC THANKSGIVING:

IN

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

WESTFIELD, N. Y.,

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BY REUBEN TINKER,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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DISCOURSE.

ECCLESIASTES vii : 10. Say not thou, What is *the cause* that the former days were better than these ? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

ANOTHER annual THANKSGIVING convenes us in this sanctuary to praise God for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. We are happy on this day, set apart by our rulers, to engage with the millions of our countrymen in that service which continually, and not occasionally, employs the heavenly host ; for dwelling as they do in the temple of the universe, which temple is God himself, and, in their everlasting rest, needing no weekly Sabbaths ; so they observe no annual Thanksgivings ; eternity itself being the period of their adoration and praise. But since we, in our imperfection, must contemplate their "eternal now" as made up of times and ages, we may be pardoned in the thought, that to them, as well as to us, it were not an inappropriate caution, "Say not, what is the cause that the former days were better than these ?" for it is our conviction, that among the celestials, excellent as every preceding age may have been, the present surpasses its predecessors. But however it may be with them, we in this lower sphere observe times and seasons, days and years. On the dial of that great clock whose wheels, weights, and figures are planets and suns, we find marked off for us day and night, summer and winter, infancy, youth, manhood, and decline, this age and that, the former and the latter days. These days, whether literal ones, or centuries of years,

are the result of motion ; motion is change of place ; change of place is progress or retrogression ;—progress is the general law of the universe—retrogression the exception. The earth, her sister planets, and their central sun are not now in space where they were ages or even months ago ; they have moved on in their march toward the great West of immensity ; nor are we now in the orbit of our existence where we were at any preceding period, we have passed on toward the setting sun of life, toward the shore of eternity's ocean, to the golden and pacific coast, or to a troubled sea of storms, darkness and tempest. So generations pass ; one goeth and another cometh ; and each succeeding one is in fault, if it be not wiser and better than the former. For while in some respects there is nothing new under the sun, inasmuch as the laws of matter and mind, and the essence of things, are, like their Author, the same yesterday, to-day and forever, yet the various elements may, in their combinations, aspects, agencies, developments, habits, and emotions, furnish a new earth, and a higher grade of inhabitants to dwell upon it. One period may differ from another period, the former days may be better than the present ; the present superior to the past.

The general law of the universe is progression, and our world is not an exception. No ; could its entire history be laid before you, it would justify the address of our text, "Say not thou, what is the cause that the former days were better than these ? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." They were not better. They were not alike good. For, while in a world full of compensations, one thing being set over against another, the sum total in the different ages both of good and ill might differ less than some fondly suppose, still we must think that wisdom is justified in her children, who deem the present period superior to any preceding one.

Let it be, then, our proposition, as it is, we think, both

the sentiment of the times and of our text, that the present days are better than the former ; and let the question be, What is the cause of their superiority ? And if we inquire wisely concerning this, and make good the proof, then we have ground of thanksgiving to God ; for who but God makes one period to differ from another ? and what has this or any age, that it did not receive from him ?

A comparison of different periods opens a wide field ; an hour's discourse can do it no justice ; volumes would be required, where a passing glance must suffice.

The record of the antediluvian age of sixteen hundred and fifty years is compressed into a few lines ; long life, corruption and the flood ; no memorials, no ground for comparison of that with this, more than there was ground for the foot of the dove in the deluge. The period from Noah to the christian era, one of twenty-three centuries and a half, was renowned for the Jewish nation and church ; the giving of the moral law at Sinah ; the inspiration of prophets ; miraculous interpositions of providence ; destructive wars, regal splendor, famous poets, eloquent orators, skillful artists, Grecian glory, and Roman dominion, whose praises have often been said and sung. The next eighteen hundred years are remarkable for an event which has no equal—the advent of Christ, the sacrifice of Calvary, not in behalf of that age alone, but for men of all times and nations. The early christians were many in numbers and graces ; Paul, Peter, and others, eminent, unsurpassed ; the gospel ran and was glorified. But a dark thousand years succeeded with its monasticism, superstition, mysticism, and crusades ; the latter centuries illustrious by the art of printing, the discovery of America, the reformation by Luther, the piety of the Puritans, the settlement of this country, the American revolution, the progress of education, inventions, revivals of religion, and the renewing of Christian missions among the heathen.

Of the last eighteen centuries, the seventeenth and the eighteenth are unquestionably the most remarkable, excelling any others in this world's history, abounding in more men — if not more in flesh and blood, more at least in all that ennobles humanity — more in intelligence, enterprise, morality, and religion. Compare England in the year 1600, with England in the year 1800. Macaulay has done this in his history; read it, and mark the change. Compare this western continent as it was in 1600, inhabited by Indians, with what it was in 1800, and mark the change in two centuries, and be satisfied that the latter days were better than the former. And best of all, the last fifty years, the first half of the present century; as also this year, the first year of the last half of the nineteenth century. The latter days are better than the former.

They are better in the length of human life. We value life. We give all we have for it; so do others. It is a point in which we all see eye to eye. Life is a blessing. Now the present period of the world is superior to the preceding in the average duration of human existence. We may except the antediluvian age; and the patriarchal, if we look only at the individuals whose record has come down to us; while we have no means of ascertaining the average age to which the human family then attained. But in lands where data for comparisons exist, the present days are better than the former. At the close of the 17th century, the annual number of deaths in London rose to 21,000. A hundred years later, notwithstanding the increase of population, the number was only 17,000. In the middle of the last century, the annual mortality was still one in twenty; at present, it is only one in forty; so that it has diminished exactly one-half. The towns of Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool, have presented almost the same decrease of mortality as London. France, like England, has experienced a

great diminution of mortality. In 1781, it was computed, that one death took place in that country to every twenty-nine inhabitants; now, one in forty. In Sweden, half a century ago, one death occurred to every thirty-five inhabitants; in 1823, one to forty-eight. Likewise at Berlin, in 1750, the annual mortality was one to twenty-eight; at present the ratio is less than one to thirty-four.* As civilization advances, mortality diminishes. The increase of knowledge, the progress of the arts, and the multiplication of the comforts and conveniences of life favor longevity.

Another thought in this connection is, that the inhabitants of the present day live longer than their predecessors in the same number of years. They possess more information, they participate in more action, they transact more business, they are the depositories of more hopes and fears, pleasures and pains. Journeys are reduced in time while multiplied in number and length; the hours and strength devoted to productive industry yield double, and in some cases thirty, sixty and an hundred fold. And what is this but an increase of life? For it is an undoubted truth, though it may not strike you so without some little reflection, that if the movements of the heavens and the earth, and all upon the face of the earth were doubled in velocity; if the sun passed from east to west in half its present time, and our clocks and watches doubled their speed, and our movements were twice as fast; our every transaction, thought, feeling, and habit, hastened in the same degree and in perfect harmony; we should then live as long as we do now in years of half their present length,—in other words we should not be conscious of any change at all; everything would seem precisely as at present, while the actual length of our earthly existence were measured by years and days of half their present dura-

* Bibliotheca Sacra, Oct. 1851.

tion;—so that we should to all intents and purposes live three score years and ten in thirty-five years of the existing chronology. Now, since a part of this acceleration is realized, we moving more rapidly, while the other part is not realized, the earth revolving as slowly as heretofore; our years remaining the same in absolute length of time, while the rate of our living is relatively and essentially increased, one year becomes lengthened to two, three, or more; so that a life of forty years is doubled to eighty, trebled to one hundred and twenty, or quadrupled to one hundred and sixty; and the man of four score years becomes a Methusaleh. Hence Col. David Mack in looking back on his life, when more than ninety years of age, said, “taken as whole it seems short like a hand-breadth before me; but when I look at the great and astonishing changes which have taken place, and when I trace them from the commencement to the grand result, and when I look at my posterity, my children’s children, I almost feel that I have lived forever!” Now since life is so great a blessing, and increased in these latter days in both its absolute and relative length, the former days, in this, were not better than these, nor alike good; the present are vastly superior; so that while in other centuries, our ancestors who lived to a good old age, had reason to thank God for length of days, we have cause to thank him in a deeper, fuller tone, and to praise him in a longer and loftier anthem.

Again; the latter days are better than the former in wealth; or in the multiplied objects which it procures, whether classed among the necessities, the conveniences, comforts or luxuries of life. Property is neither to be despised nor lightly esteemed, no, not by the children of light; for it is God’s gift to be received with thanksgiving—employed as a servant, not worshipped as an idol. In the possession of this blessing, one is now an host compared with the men of other ages; the moon is as the

sun; the light of the sun not only as seven days, but as seventy times seven. In the palmiest days of Egypt, Greece and Rome, not excepting the Celestial Empire, when walls, pyramids, parthenons and coliseums, were reared to endure for ages the wonders of the world, the masses, the millions, who toiled like beasts of burden in their construction, were poor and ignorant, dwelling in huts, dens, and caves of the earth; clad in skins, or in cloth spun thread by thread, and twisted with their fingers; while the agriculturist tilled the ground with sharpened stakes. Much of the eastern world was unknown; this continent was a wilderness, the forest trees waved here instead of golden harvests; wolves and foxes prowled in the fields where herds and flocks now find pasture. To say nothing of the extreme former days, when thorns united garments, we can remember when it took sixteen men in Old England to make a pin; now, like the stars in multitude they are struck into being, and marshalled in papers by the turn of a wheel. In other times, the wheat, barley and cummin were reaped with a sickle, beaten out with a staff, winnowed with a fan, and bruised in a mortar, or by “two women grinding at the mill;” now a machine moves over the acres, reaping, threshing, and winnowing at the same time the wheat, which water and steam-mills convert into flour by ship loads, day by day, for our daily bread. In former days, a pane of glass was more than a monarch in all his glory could boast; with us it abounds till we call to our aid curtains and blinds to keep out the light. A crystal to cover the face of a watch was once a wonder; now a crystal palace, covering acres enough for a farm, opens its doors to high and low, and shelters at the same hour as many as dwell in the city of Albany, and in six months receives to its embrace more millions twice told than all the people of the United States in the days of the American Revolution. Poor men now are as rich

as rich men used to be ; “ articles of furniture which in the golden age of literature and art could be found only in the palaces of kings, and by them deemed more valuable than an equal weight of gold, are employed by us in the most common and menial services. The makers of purple and fine linen in the days of Tyre and Sidon could only supply enough of their precious fabric, to clothe the princes and the mighty men of a single empire. A fabric of equally practical value, can now be produced by a much smaller number of hands, so rapidly that should the web be attached to a merchant vessel circumnavigating the earth, the material could be raised, prepared, spun, woven, and drawn off the loom as fast as the ship, with an ever favoring wind, could extend it round the globe.” The waterfalls are performing the work of ten thousand thousand men, and steam the labor of millions, in the manufacture of an endless variety and amount of wares and merchandize. “ In every work-shop machinery accomplishes some portion of the toil, from the ponderous trip-hammer which forges the shaft of a steamer, to the delicate arrangement that stamps and slits the pens with which we write.” Men have sought out many inventions for filling the horns of plenty at so cheap a rate, that their contents can be poured into our lap ; while the facilities for travel and transportation wait at our doors. On ocean, lake, and river, fleets of boats are passing, not only like a vapor, but by a vapor propelled — one of which on the Hudson, having little pre-eminence above many others, a fairy palace called the New World, is three hundred and seventy-five feet in length, and swift of foot as a wild roe, by an enginery equal in power to that of two thousand six hundred and forty horses. And yet, rapidly as she and her compeers move on the water, the iron horses on the land leave them behind without an effort, as they puff and whistle over the hills, and through the rocks, mountains and valleys, followed by the ponder-

ous trains close at their heels ; while these in their turn are charged with the folly of standing still, by the posts and the wires, which, without moving a step, convey the news at the rate of ten thousand miles in the twinkling of an eye ! All these things are familiar to your ears and eyes ; the slightest mention will strike you as an old story, the repetition of an oft told tale. Very well : and yet it is not long ago that men lived and died without the sight, or even the thought ; and this is proof that they did not abound, as we do, in the comforts of the present life. Our ancestors, it is true, never suffered to any great extent for food, attire and abode ; they kept Thanksgivings from their early settlement on the bleak shores of New England ; they deemed the bounties of Providence very abundant ; they felt like David in the twenty-second Psalm, that their cup ran over, their heads were anointed with oil, and their table spread in the presence of their enemies. They said, “ Surely mercy and goodness have followed us all the days of our life.” But what a contrast between their estate and ours ; nay, between the country now and fifty, or even twenty-five years ago, for many of our villages, cities and States did not exist at a period more remote. What was called the first generation of houses has been succeeded by the second, and third, improved in size, finish, furniture, pantry and wardrobe, all more comely, convenient, and valuable than the former. Look at this village as it was thirty years since, or at any other villages and cities ; how changed from what they were ! — while a multitude of others have sprung into being as by the wand of enchantment ! Had it been possible for a man first to have ascended into the air, and surveyed the continent from north to south, from east to west, as it was in 1801, and then to have gone to sleep and waked up in 1851, and from the same high point looked again on our country — what would be his impression of the former and the latter days ? Or could a dozen fathers

and mothers, who died one hundred years ago, come back to the earth to-day, and unite with their posterity throughout these United States in the observance of our present Thanksgiving, would they know where they are? Would they think they had ever seen this world before? They might recognize Cape Cod, Connecticut River, Mount Tom, and Monadnoc, the site of Boston, Hartford and New York, and a few of the old houses, and here and there a road they traveled, and some of the tombstones which they helped to erect, with faces sculptured on them having wings in place of ears; they might feel old associations awakened among the relics of the Pilgrims in the Hall at Old Plymouth, the chairs and the cooking utensils there assembled, and the sword of Miles Standish; but where would they think themselves to be when in the Patent Office at Washington, or among the gold mines of Sacramento, or on the wire bridge of Niagara? Tell them they have great-grandchildren in Wisconsin and Iowa, others in San Francisco and Oregon, and others still in Louisiana. Let them understand how many hundreds or thousands of miles lie between these places and Massachusetts or Connecticut, where they themselves used to live, and where we suppose them now to be. They express the wish that it were possible to see any of these their descendants, or at least to hear from them; but their furlough permitting their return to earth extends only to one month, and they relinquish the idea, as in that time they could not go further than "the Black River country," "Holland Purchase," or possibly to "New Connecticut." You make no reply, but step to the Telegraph office, and speak to their descendants. In the course of the day a letter comes in from one dwelling at Milwaukie, and soon another from Cincinnati; and while that is in reading, in comes another from St. Louis, and a fourth from New Orleans, welcoming their ancestors back to this world, hoping to hear from them daily during

the month of their stay; and expressing their intention during that time to come to the East and take them to their homes for a visit, and then return them back to New England that they may thence again depart to the land of spirits. With surprise they inquire, "How did they learn that we are here?" You reply, I wrote to them this morning that you had arrived, and these are their answers. We correspond now with friends a thousand miles distant as easily as you did a hundred years ago with your nearest neighbors. "And who carries your letters?" The lightning. We make a motion here, and the same instant our thoughts are written there. "But how can we visit them as if it were a short journey? Are your horses lightning too?" No: but they are iron and fire, they breathe out flame and smoke, they travel from Boston to Lake Erie in a day, drawing tons of baggage and thousands of passengers. We go in boats driven by steam twenty-five miles an hour. We spin, we weave, we sow, we reap, we grind as rapidly as we travel. Instead of the wheel which spun one thread, and the loom of your times which wove it, our wheels now spin a thousand threads at once, and the looms shoot their shuttles a thousand to one, and water and steam do the work. You shall go with me to our manufactories and hear their music; visit the printing presses where Bibles are made one in a minute; and forges where implements of husbandry are formed at a blow; and the mint, which scatters out dollars like the drops of a shower. This country, dear friends, has changed since you left it. We illuminate our cities with air; we heat them with coal which was buried in the ground before Adam was taken out of it; we write, as you see, quick as thought; our portraits are painted by the sun at half a minute's sitting; and the land, which in your day was a waste howling wilderness, is full of people; while that part, which was settled then, has so changed you will scarce recognize one place in a

hundred. Let us go to-morrow to Boston, take the cars for Albany and onward to Buffalo, call at Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and other cities which have all sprung into being a few years since; and after visiting your posterity in that great West, and having seen our thoroughfares, railroads, boats, prairies, manufactories, cities, churches, and benevolent institutions, Sabbath-schools, asylums and prisons; and marked the habitations, the furniture, the conveniences, comforts and luxuries which fall under your eyes, and are possessed by the mass of the people — I wish you to compare the present age as you find it in these and other respects with the days when you lived on the earth, and leave us your affidavit whether the former days were better than these; whether the world has improved or degenerated; whether, if in 1751, you were called upon by the mercies of God to observe a day of Thanksgiving, we have not more cause still to do it — to call on our souls and all within us to bless his holy name, and to invite the orchestra of heaven's host to join us in praising Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Again; the latter days are better than the former in the amount of mind. This is manifest in the changes to which we have already referred, those changes being effects of which increased intelligence and thought are the cause; while these effects, like streams running to and fro, fall back and in turn increase still more the fountain of knowledge from which they emanate. In former days men wrote on leaves and skins with a reed, — now the raw material annually wrought into paper in this country is estimated at six millions of dollars. Till within a few centuries the art of printing was unknown; now the pages of the many books of which there is no end in making, fall from the press like the leaves of autumn. There have been learned men, intellectual giants, in other times; and education was a matter of

high regard in this country from its first settlement; but never in former days as now. Count the school-houses and the schoolmasters abroad in the land; number the academies, colleges, and other institutions of learning; make a catalogue of the students, the books, the periodicals, and compare them with those of former days; and we shall see that education is a distinguishing feature of our present history. Nor in our history only. Look across the ocean. Even the thieves and vagabonds of London are gathered into what they call there, "ragged schools." Ireland is laying the foundation of a school system in spite of the opposition of the Romish church. In Prussia we find a system of schools, as rigorous in its embrace of the whole people, as the system of taxation itself. France has had a system of schools supported by law for nearly twenty years. Belgium, Holland and Denmark likewise possess a public school system. Sweden has none as yet, though she is awake to the importance of public education; and we have made to her queen of song, Jenny Lind, a donation of half a million of dollars for the avowed purpose of establishing a school system in the Scandinavian kingdom of Northern Europe. Half a million of scholars of all grades are said to belong to the public schools of Russia. Spain and Portugal sleep in ignorance. Italy is awake in part to the importance of popular education, Turkey talks about it, and Greece is attaining a stand on this subject worthy of her former fame.* But aside from the schools, it is an age when men and women think, and speak their thoughts. He who has any thing to communicate can address it to the common eye and heart of mankind. One press driven by steam shoots off from its whizzing cylinders more pages in an hour than were written out by the whole human race in a thousand years of the world's history previous to the age of Alexander, or the thousand years subsequent

* New Englander, 1851, p. 456.

to that of Constantine. The product of the press is taken up by the cars and the boats and hurried to our firesides ; " he who runs may read, and the most scantily furnished cabin of our Western frontier, or the humblest cot in England's glens, needs not lack the furnishing of the mightiest minds of present or of ancient time." " And the beautiful fiction of the poet in which he represents a heavenly messenger descending to our earth upon a sun-beam, and keeping pace with its flight, is almost realized in the familiar process by which intelligence is brought to us from places a thousand miles remote every morning." It is a period of mental activity, of free thought and discussion ; the light of intelligence shines with greater intensity ; and since wisdom excelleth folly as light excelleth darkness, we have occasion this day to offer to the Father of lights thanksgiving and praise that the latter days are better than the former.

If any should object to this, that saying of Solomon, " In much wisdom is much grief ; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow ;" and that unless moral principle and virtue attend mental illumination, knowledge is an engine of evil and not of good ; — our reply is, that while the blessings of heaven of whatever kind are liable to be abused, and are abused by many, yet the advancement of the present age is the result of moral principle, a fruit of christianity, or of that godliness which has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. And we anticipate greater triumphs for the truth in days yet to come, because the present is an era of unparalleled enterprise, invention, locomotion and general knowledge. It is a harbinger of the millennial day that the mountains are leveled and the valleys exalted, that many run to and fro and knowledge is increased. True, the press may be, and is, employed to disseminate infidelity and falsehood ; but it scatters also the leaves of light and truth, and the truth is stronger than error. The greater

attainments men make in physical science, and the more the powers of nature are mastered by them, the more is necessity laid upon them to obey the laws of nature's God. For instance, the more perfect the art of destroying men shall become, the fewer will be destroyed ; for, were an engine invented by which one man could in a moment cut off an army, or blow up battle ships and fortresses, then, moved by the law of self-preservation, men would learn war no more. When the laws of the human constitution are understood by all, quackery will cease, as sorcery and necromancy have, from among enlightened communities. When all are so skillful in science and in mechanism that locks, checks and safes afford no protection, our security will be sought and found in a higher standard of public morality—the best security for our property and lives. When more mines of gold shall be discovered, or when the riches of the land and sea shall be brought into the possession of all, a more severe and salutary check will be given to ambition, extortion and oppression, than by all our sermons on the madness and vanity of riches and tyrants. Not that we suppose that men's hearts are renewed by prosperity, intellectual culture, science, and philosophy ; no—the mighty power of the Divine Spirit renews the heart by means of the truth ;—but that, in the language of another, " all advances in physical science and the useful arts can justly be regarded as efficient instrumentalities brought into existence by Divine Providence in the appointed time, and destined to be employed in the establishment of Christianity, and the permanent improvement of mankind. If it is any better for men to dwell in cleanly and well-warmed apartments, than to shiver in the open air before a fire of logs,—if it is any better for them to be clothed in cheap, yet healthful and becoming garments, than to be wrapped in the undressed hides of beasts,—if their comfortable subsist-

ence is any more secure when they understand the method of enriching barren soils and reducing the rough and intractable to a state of cultivation, than when they gather their food from the accidental growth of the forest, or the still more uncertain products of the chase,—if their opportunities and inducements to secure intellectual cultivation are any greater, when the means of preserving health and preventing disease are so much better understood as to extend the average duration of human life to double its present amount,—if the reign of universal peace may be regarded as any nearer, when different nations, instead of regarding each other as natural enemies, are brought into intimate communication with each other, and are daily more and more admitting and acting upon the community of interest existing between them,—then certainly "the former days were not better than these, and "there is more hope for the world now than ever before." This is the age the Lord hath made; the dayspring visits us, and we give thanks that knowledge is increased.

Again; we may add, that the spirit of peace on earth, and good will among the nations toward each other, is more manifest now than in past periods. There seems to be a feeling of brotherhood uniting different tribes and countries; or if not that, self-interest is binding them together. The facilities for travel and transportation do this. The rapid communication of intelligence contributes to it. The swift steamers and packets, and the commercial exchanges, favor it. The iron roads and the wires are bones and sinews running through and binding together the kingdoms, and constituting them more and more members of one great family. The prosperity of one is becoming the prosperity of all; and the calamity of each is felt by the other—not so fully as it should be, and will be; but more now by far than in any preced-

ing age. Most of the voluntary benevolent associations had their birth in the present century;—peace societies to mitigate and abolish war; prison discipline societies to reclaim criminals; temperance societies to stay the tide of death; hospitals and asylums in which the lunatic is restored to his right mind, the deaf made to hear, the lame to walk, and the blind to see—these are evidences that the present days are better than the past. The rights of men to freedom, equal laws, and just government, are understood, asserted and maintained as never before. The yokes of oppression are not all broken—some are—and others are growing weaker. The millions have not their rights, but they are struggling to attain them. "China is restive under her scheme of civil polity. India requires hundreds of thousands of British soldiers to keep her in subjection. Turkey is not quiet under the rule of the Sublime Porte. Hungary—we know her story;" and, if not, Kossuth will soon tell it to us, face to face, as he has already written it with pen and ink. "Austria, Prussia, Denmark, Italy, France,—where is there a spot in Europe that is not ready even now to be rent asunder by some outburst of the pent-up forces of freedom? Yes. Man is no longer to be the bauble or the serf, as he has been, of his fellow man, whom intrigue or prescription may have seated in the throne of power. Man is to be free. The law of the strongest is to give place to the law of truth and justice, the law of nature and of God." The progress which the world makes to freedom is slow; but it moves, and in the right direction, and never so fast as now. The spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and knowledge, smites the oppressor with the rod of his mouth, and slays the wicked with the breath of his lips. And for this we give unto God most hearty and united thanks; and cheer the nations on to gain the other side of the flood; and hope we may live to hear them saying

to each other and to us, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously ; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Once more. The present days are better than the former in their religious history. For, while it must be admitted that the interests of religion have not advanced as rapidly as our material interests ; while it pains us to contrast the little done for the world's conversion with the magnitude of the work, and our means for doing it ; while we are ashamed of our donations for the spread of the gospel, in comparison with our expenditures for that which perishes in the using ; and blush at the contrast in numbers between the armies to destroy men's lives, and the soldiers of the cross, fighting the battles in which life and immortality are the crowns both of the vanquished and the victors ;—yet when we compare the present with the past, we have reason to-day to thank God and take courage. The last half century has been emphatically an era of missions, prosecuted by the churches of different denominations, in this and other countries, to an extent embracing the globe, and with a success which leads us to exclaim, "Lo, what hath God wrought!" In Greenland and at the Cape of Good Hope, in India, China and the islands of the sea, in places too many now to be enumerated, has the gospel been proclaimed in various languages, churches have been gathered, and the hope inspired, that ere long the whole earth shall see the salvation of God. The Bible, which in other days cost £35, for a single copy, and was possessed by few, is now multiplied to forty millions of copies, printed in nearly two hundred languages and dialects at a price limited to the means of penury itself. In our own country, a thousand home missionaries and five hundred colporteurs are employed in the more recently settled and destitute portions of the land ; while

Sabbath schools receive to their embrace and blessing a multitude of children and youth. These and many other benevolent associations and enterprises were not known in former days. When I was a boy, there were few religious books for children. The New England Primer, Janeway's Token for Children, and Dr. Watts' Divine Songs for Children, were about or quite the whole unless the Pilgrim's Progress be added, which interests all readers, the young as well as the old. But at present the entire number of publications accessible, that may be classed under the general denomination of youthful, christian literature, in our country, is probably not less than three thousand five hundred. And as a result of all this, more in early life have become pious than in past generations ; while the churches have been blessed also with frequent and extensive revivals of religion which have embraced many of those in middle life, and some of the aged. Besides, there is a better tone of piety now than in former days—by which I do not mean that individuals of other times were not even more eminent Christians than any with us ; certainly we should be at a loss where to look for better than Baxter, Doddridge, Edwards and Brainerd ; but I mean the general spirit. It is more charitable. Sects are more tolerant. Christian alliances are formed. Even a Protestant chapel is allowed to exist under the shadow of St. Peter's church at Rome ; while Cardinal Wiseman is permitted to occupy the precincts of Westminster Abbey in the name of the Pope. Men worship more in undisturbed freedom, and truth is left to fight her battles in her own strength against error,—while more aids are furnished to all in interpreting the Scriptures and ascertaining what truth is ; so that at home and abroad, both in its extent and its tone, the piety of the present excels the past, is becoming more the great business of life, and girding itself for the conquest of the world.

Very imperfectly have we glanced at the reasons which we have for gratitude to God, found in a comparison of the present with former days. "Science, arts, liberty and religion have all been going forward, and advancing, like the orbs of heaven in the strictest harmony with each other;" and all contributing to man's temporal or eternal happiness. The comforts of life were never so widely diffused; men's civil rights were never so generally acknowledged; the mass of mind was never so well informed; the means of education were never so abundant. The gospel evinces its power in evangelizing heathen tribes; the Bible withstands the attacks of infidelity and the objections of science; the pulpit better accomplishes its purpose; religious periodicals, tracts and volumes are giving the truth a wider range, and a more searching application to the heart. False religions and forms are dying, and never, never was the prospect so fair for the universal triumph of christianity as it is on this first Thanksgiving day of the last half of the nineteenth century.

If now we inquire, what is the cause of the world's advancement? the reply is, God is the cause. He is the author, the finisher of all. He made the old heavens and the old earth, and he is making the new heavens and the new earth. He controls matter and mind; his hand is in the star, the eye and the telescope also; in the waterfall and the water-wheel. He makes the lightning of the thunder, and he sends the lightning of the telegraph. In his hand are the revolutions of earth and her progress in her orbit, and in his hand too are the revolutions of empires, and their progress in their orbits. His are the fires of the volcano, and his also the fires of the forge; the vapors of the clouds are his chariot, and his too the vapor which drives our chariots. The golden streets of the New Jerusalem are his, and equally so the golden mines of California. Do we ask, what is the cause that these

days are better than the former? The cause is God. He made the world and man to dwell upon it; he gave his law to guide it, and his Son to die for it, and his gospel to bless it, and his Spirit to regenerate it; for, as I live, saith He, The whole earth shall be filled with my glory. The latter days are better than the former, because they have a commission from Him to surpass their predecessors. Watt, Franklin, Fulton, Whitney and Morse had their work appointed by the great King no less than Paul, Luther and Whitefield. Cyrus, Senecharib and Pilate, were his agents as well as Isaiah, David and John. God is in history no less than in nature; and if the undevout astronomer is mad, so is he mad who does not find his devotion enkindled, not only when he sees the angel flying through the midst of heaven bearing the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, but also when he "observes the caravans of travelers hastening along the thoroughfares, and the stupendous freights of all kinds of merchandise borne from the interior towards the sea, and from the seaports and marts of manufactures towards regions from which the forests have hardly begun to disappear;"—seeing this, mad he is, if his wonder does not grow devout and rise into worship. Hence, permit me to inquire, Are we not at fault in our thanksgivings by withholding from God the praise which is due unto him? For, in the language of Dr. Bacon, "as a people we are wont to thank God for the goodly land which he has given us; but do we give him thanks as we ought, for the new and amazing power of locomotion which is multiplying, four fold and ten fold, for us and our posterity, the riches of our inheritance? It is common to thank God for the spontaneously productive powers of nature—for the rich soil, the genial warmth and softening showers of spring, the ripening heat of summer, the joyful harvest season, and the fleecy mantle of winter that keeps the earth warm and refreshes

it for another season of production ; but why not praise him also for that wonderful gift of his providence which brings all parts of our almost boundless domain into so close a communication ; which gives to the emigrant in his invasion of the wilderness, the benefit of the capital and skill of the older states ; and which at the same time, and by the same process, pours the superabundant harvests of the West into the storehouses of the East, and feeds the households of New England with food that grew upon the prairies ?" It is a thought to awaken our devotion, that "by the progressive discoveries of science, the inventions of art, and the achievements and constructions of industry, God is creating a new earth for the habitation of man and the glory of man's Redeemer. How inspiring to think of what the new earth will be, when this work of physical renovation, and with it that moral and spiritual creation to which the physical is subordinate, shall have been consummated !—when nature shall have disclosed to the interrogations of science a thousand powers and uses now unknown—when the material world shall have opened exhaustless sources of wealth that have never yet been dreamed of—when art shall have decorated the globe in every region with its constructions of utility and beauty—when war, oppression and frauds under which the nations groan, shall have passed away—when every vale shall be as Sharon, and every mountain as Hermon and the hill of Zion—and when the ransomed millions of mankind shall own their Redeemer and their King. Under the benignant providence of God, all good influences are working together towards that consummation." For that the latter days, the last fifty years have been better than the former, and demand superior gratitude.

From these general views—from the comparison of the present with preceding ages—we pass for a moment to speak of this year ; one of great favor to this State and entire nation ; one in which the goodness of Al-

mighty God has been signally manifested, and which we find well summed up in the Proclamation of our Governor, His Excellency, Washington Hunt, in these words : "The blessings of liberty, national tranquility and public health have been enjoyed without interruption ; the fruits of the earth, in overflowing abundance, have rewarded the labors of the husbandman ; public improvements have been advanced ; the truths of knowledge and religion more widely diffused ; and our republican institutions preserved and strengthened. A just sense of these beneficent dispensations should inspire universal gratitude toward our Divine Benefactor, and call forth appropriate demonstrations of homage and adoration." That demonstration we are assembled to make. Nor we alone. For the first time in our history, almost, if not quite, the entire nation unite with us in observing this self-same day as one of Prayer, Thanksgiving and Praise. So that, in the language of Governor Wood, of Ohio, in his Proclamation, "in union with our sisters of the Confederacy, we present the sublime and moral consideration of an entire people, from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans, *united at the same moment*, in fervent and sincere devotion to the throne of grace, that in his own good Providence all causes of dissension and dissatisfaction may be stayed by his Almighty hand, and that heavenly influence continued in our behalf, without which our independence could not have been achieved, the union of the States preserved, nor the blessings arising from religious toleration enjoyed, throughout the vast expanse of this great and mighty nation." Oh, that this may be the universal sentiment to which all shall heartily respond, and a united song of praise ascend to heaven as the voice of many waters ; for "he hath not dealt so with any nation. Praise ye the Lord."

We, my friends, have abundant cause to praise him. The past year with us has been one of universal health.

Fewer seats at our tables to-day will be found made vacant by death than in other years. I cannot remember that during the past twelve months there has been one funeral solemnity in this house, (with the exception of one for an individual of another town,) which is, I think, a peculiar fact in your experience. We have been favored with a fruitful season. General prosperity and progress are manifest among us, meeting the eye in all our streets. The influences of the divine Spirit have been vouchsafed, sinners converted, and the accessions to this church have exceeded those of any year since my connection with it. Our county of Chautauque has been joined more intimately with other counties in this State, and with the Eastern States and Continent, by the union bands which have been consummated between the Atlantic and Lake Erie. And here I almost pause to hearken for the whistle, which announces the train of cars at your door to discharge your friends, who have since yesterday noon come from beyond the Hudson to eat with you the thanksgiving feast; and you wish me to close, that you may hasten home to greet them. Be patient; wait a little longer. In a few days that sound shall come from the East and pass on to the West, and break our bondage; no season of the year shall restrain our movements; but free and fleet as the wind, we go up and down in the earth. Go your way, and as ye go, remember that these better days demand of you better characters; and that, however much this world may be improved, you are pilgrims and strangers in it. Walk in the highway of holiness; send your thoughts and desires on the line of telegraph between the footstool and the throne of the great King; and occupy, as good stewards, till your Lord comes. "Go your way; eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Praise

him for his mercy to you, to your families, to your State and country: praise him for the light which is dawning on the nations: praise him that the present days are better than the past: praise him that the future is to excel the present; that every valley is to be exalted, every mountain brought low, the crooked made straight, and the rough places plain, the glory of the Lord revealed, and all flesh see it together. Praise God, ye islands of the sea, waiting for his law: praise him, Africa-shaking off thy chains: praise him, ye millions of India and China, as your walls become salvation and your gates praise. Rejoice all ye lands, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth: the great trumpet of the gospel is blown; its reverberations of mercy roll round the earth; the world hears it and obeys the summons, and from every tribe, nation, kindred, and tongue, a great multitude which no man can number come to the everlasting THANKSGIVING OF THE UNIVERSE, and with united harp and voice swell the thunder of the halleluia chorus to God and the Lamb through all the days of eternity—days better than the past—days better than these, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."